

SENATOR CHRISTINE COHEN

Twelfth District

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State of Connecticut
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Dear Senator Osten, Representative Horn, Senator Champagne, Representative Howard and Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

Thank you for reserving H.B. 5420, *An Act Concerning Mental Health Needs of and Services for Police Officers, Certain Requirements Regarding Police Training and Certain Reports*, for a public hearing. I write in strong support and wanted to speak specifically to Section 3 of the proposal which appropriates one hundred thousand dollars in funding to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to provide grants to nonprofit organizations to provide crisis intervention training for police officers.

As mental health related calls are on the rise, it has never been more important to equip our police forces with the vital resources they need to respond. Hearing this concern from so many constituents and seeing the successful impact of trained crisis intervention officers in my own district, I have been actively engaged in advocating for increased collaboration between mental health professionals and police officers. During this time, I have learned about the important impact that crisis intervention training has on our police and the people they serve, as well as the importance of good collaboration between mental health professionals and law enforcement to safely connect those in crisis with vital services.

According to the Council on State Government's Justice Center, in areas where a strong collaboration exists between police and mental health professionals, we see greater success in officers connecting those who need services to appropriate community resources. These connections to resources lead to a reduction in the number of repeated encounters individuals have with law enforcement because they are more likely to receive the care they need. This connection to mental health professionals gives more options to the responding police and in the end, helps to minimize arrests. Finally, these strong connections help reduce use of force in encounters with people who are experiencing a crisis. Considering that at least 20% of police calls for service involve a mental health or substance use crisis, it is evident that there is an urgent need for these programs to be funded fully.

Having worked closely with the police chiefs in my district and the Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE), I have learned that there is a demand for increased access to crisis intervention training by police officers. This legislation would allow for CABLE to host additional trainings on the Memphis Model of Crisis Intervention Teams to police departments. The funding would ensure that CABLE can hire additional trainers and offer more training classes so that a sufficient number of officers in each municipal police department's patrol division are trained. Additionally, I ask that the committee adds language to require that each police department identify a Crisis Intervention Training Coordinator to oversee crisis intervention training activity and also act as a liaison to community mental health partners.

This legislation is crucial to ensure that CABLE can expand their course offerings to more departments. Without such funding, the curriculum offered currently is insufficient to meet the

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demand. Such funding would further the collaboration between Connecticut law enforcement officers with mental health professionals and continue to support and advance the good work officers do to assist those experiencing a mental health crisis every day.

I urge the committee to consider this proposal, and additions suggested and move it forward so that we can further crisis intervention course training to Connecticut law enforcement officers, and continue to support and advance the good work they do to assist those experiencing a mental health crisis in communities every day.